incredibly annoying, and the networks (and advertisers) know it, as witnessed by the fact that they never do it during the ads. But promotional crawls on programs have the added advantage of making home recordings off-the-air less desirable, and thus, the networks believe, a spur to DVD sales.

13. **Rotating Strategy**. This is a very old strategy being reintroduced because of a shortage of original episodes and the need to have original programming during sweeps periods. In the early days of network television, the very popular *Jack Benny Show* ran every other week, regularly alternating with another program. By 1960, this practice had disappeared, but then some cable networks reintroduced it in a slightly different variation. As they moved toward more original production, but usually ordered merely 10 to 13 episodes, cable programmers were faced with *the problem of what to do when original episodes ran out*.

They solved the problem by scheduling more than a single series for the same time slot. For example, Syfy Channel runs 10 to 13 weeks of *Warehouse 13*, followed by 6 to 8 episodes of *Eureka* followed by 7 episodes of *Merlin*. This allows Syfy's programmers to maximize the value of the original episodes while spreading out production costs, having a total of 26 episodes, which with reruns, fills a whole season. By 2011, the networks were beginning to do the same thing with reality series. For example, FOX and CBS each scheduled a hit, *American Idol* and *Survivor,* to run during sweeps and then filled the time between sweeps with other, far less popular programs. Until now, scheduling multiple series for a single time slot has been largely limited to reality shows on the broadcast networks, but the practice (and the need) is spreading.

14. **Strip Sampling Strategy**. In the last five years, a technique to get new programs sampled appeared: new series aired on several different nights across their premier weeks—*horizontal stripping*. The theory is that wide exposure will allow as many people as possible to see the show and thus will follow it to its normal night. In a variation in 2010, *Cape* aired its premier episode on both network and cable channels during the first week—*cross-media scheduling*. To be effective, like many other strategies, such practices have to be combined with heavy promotion campaigns during the initial showing advertising the show's normal day and time.

Although these scheduling practices can readily be identified in prime-time network lineups, there is little reason to believe any has an overwhelming impact on viewing. Most were developed at a time when few people had remote controls or DVRs, and digital cable's wealth of channels and the internet didn't exist. On-demand options and recording via DVRs also encourage viewers to do their own scheduling. Today, the audience has little reluctance to change channels, and there is no shortage of places to go

The web carries rebroadcasts of highly rated or much-talked-about shows, further undermining network efforts to manipulate audience flow on television during prime time. Nonetheless, *most experts believe that well-defined and executed application of these programming strategies helps a broadcast network hold onto significant portions of the viewership*. They continue to believe this even in spite of falling numbers for network programs. On the other hand, the ratings might be worse … or so networks like to think.

Appointment Viewing

For decades, scholars have argued about how people watch television. For most of the last 50 years, practitioners assumed people passively watched the set—not programs (the *least objectionable program theory*). In short, when they had time (availability), viewers tuned in and then looked for something to watch.

About a decade ago, some researchers began contending that people actively planned their viewing around specific programs that would continue their current mood or change a bad mood. This view proved to be a hard sell in an industry that had long dismissed the idea of program loyalty in all but a few cases. For example, everyone recognizes that many soap opera viewers plan their activities so they can watch their favorite afternoon programs—that is, *appointment viewing*. But, experts argued, this happened rarely in prime time, perhaps only with such megahits as *American Idol,* live sporting events, or occasionally with highly-touted miniseries (mostly the domain of public broadcasting and cable these days).

Some shows, like *Glee* and *NCIS,* generate loyalty and exhibit appointment viewing; their fans are willing to pay extra fees for on-demand viewing and DVD sets. When researchers looked closely at program preference, they found that viewers develop strong mental images about *when* their favorite programs are on and tune in with those programs in mind. This presented a very different view of habitual viewing, which had always been assumed to be a factor in channel or network loyalty. *This understanding of the power of viewers' mental images of network schedules led to intensification of the amount and type of on-air, print and online promotion in order to create and manipulate such mental images.* Simultaneously it led to renewed interest in creating programs that spur viewing by appointment—that is, shows that are so special or events so unique that viewers plan their time around them. On the other hand, the continual shuffling of the schedule is a practice that breaks down habitual viewing and thus increases viewer frustration.

It must be understood that despite program loyalty and appointment viewing, people do not tune in every week. Most viewers do not change other plans to watch even their favorite television programs. They find comfort in knowing the series will still be there next week and that they can watch missed episodes in rerun or on DVR.

DVRs have also profoundly changed people's views of when they have to watch. The *time-shifting* of favorite programs is now a common practice because DVRs make it easy; this has become so important that several days after a program first airs are now included in the ratings. Many programmers were surprised to find that people were willing to buy DVD sets of complete seasons of their favorite television series. While ABC, CBS and NBC long resisted offering their shows in DVD sets, FOX and the CW made a sizable portion of their profits from these sets and even program for them.

Changing concepts of ordinary viewing behaviors makes the successful selection and scheduling of mass-audience programs increasingly difficult for programmers. The truth is, *as far as the major networks are concerned, programming is bait. It is a lure to get viewers to watch commercials and a commodity that can be resold to stations, mainly their own O&Os, as syndicated bait to get viewers for their ads.* The discovery that series could be resold as DVD packages forced programmers to begin to consider the actual value of the program itself (see 2.7). For programmers, however, appointment

2.7 The Value Question

To further complicate matters, the industry can't figure out which shows have resale value. FOX, for example, planned *The Simple Life,* its "Paris Hilton meets *Green Acres*" reality series, for fast DVD release. The network applauded as the series' ratings climbed, got the DVD set to the stores only one week after the series finished its run on the air, and then watched as sales went nowhere.

Meanwhile, *Firefly,* which FOX had dumped without even using all of the ordered episodes, went straight to the top of the DVD sales lists and stayed there. It was subsequently rushed into production again as a theatrical movie. At the same time, the success of *Family Guy* on DVD, another of FOX's cancelled series, was so great FOX un-cancelled it. Its performance on the network, however, was and still is only mediocre (ratings of about 2), revealing that loyalty and a willingness to buy a series on DVD are not necessarily related to broadcast audience size. The CW has known this for years as DVD sales make up a huge part of the profits for two of its series, *Smallville* and *Supernatural.*

viewing may not only refer to the planning of activities to allow the viewing of a series; it may also be a measure of how much a viewer enjoys a particular series and how much money and time he or she is willing to invest in it.

Prime-Time Ratings

Regardless of whether an advertiser wants sheer tonnage or a specific audience segment, currently, commercial spot costs depend mainly on the *absolute ratings plus 3 days* (= total estimated audience) of the programs in which the commercials occur. Nielsen is developing ratings for commercials from its minute-by-minute people-meter data, but those are not yet in common usage. A television advertiser, in contrast to an advertiser on a formatted radio station, must pay for all viewers, whether or not they fall within the desired target audience. *Estimated program ratings are the major determinant of the cost of a commercial spot.*

Ratings, however, lack precision. As pointed out in Chapter 5, network ratings *estimate* the viewing of 116 million television households using data collected from 12,000 cooperating families, and it is very unlikely that these estimates are exactly right. In fact, statisticians sometimes claim that no substantial difference exists between the 10th-rated and 50th-rated shows in prime time; the differences in their ratings could result from nothing more than inevitable sampling errors.

Because advertisers (and ad agencies) have agreed to base the price of a commercial spot on the absolute number, however, they ignore this inability to measure small differences. A top program such as *The Office* that has a rating of about 4 and an advertising price of $450,000 per 30-second spot will generate millions of dollars more in revenue than a program such as *Cougar Town* with a rating of about 3 and a spot price of $200,000, even though the difference in ratings between the two is statistically meaningless at the levels normally set by statisticians. The treatment of ratings as absolute numbers by both advertisers and networks has led to fights over unmeasurable fractions of a rating point and demands for more measurements, produced more often. These demands have led to ratings being reported continuously and in a number of different ways, many of which are outlined in Chapters 5 and 6. As a quick heads up, for prime-time network programming, the most common of these are the sweeps, overnights, pocketpieces and multinetwork reports.

Sweeps and Overnights

Four times each year a highly controversial rating event occurs—the **sweeps**. In November, February, May and July, Nielsen Media Research uses people meters in the larger markets and diaries in the smaller markets to gather audience viewing behavior that is converted into ratings, shares and demographic information for local television stations and a growing number of cable networks. The sweep results, particularly the November and February periods when audience viewing levels are at their highest, directly affect the rates these cable networks and local stations (including network-affiliates and O&Os) charge for advertising time.

Traditionally, the summer sweeps were of less importance. One summer the ratings dropped so badly that affiliates began to balk at clearing network summer shows, but in recent years some of the biggest hits have actually started during the summer. This has led the networks to claim they have moved to a full 52-week season.

The stations demand that the networks display their highest-quality merchandise during the sweeps periods to attract the largest possible audiences and maximize ad revenues. This practice makes the four sweeps periods, especially November and February, highly competitive and, at the same time, not always the most valid indicators of a network's or station's real strength.

National ratings take several different forms. Aside from the sweeps, the *overnights* are the most avidly monitored ratings data. They are gathered through people meters which sample 25,000 people (5,000 for national ratings and 20,000 for local ratings) in 56 major markets. *The overnight ratings are used to monitor overall urban audience reaction to such "program doctoring" as changes in casts,* *character emphases and plot lines, and to compare the viewing of major sporting events on broadcast and big cable networks.* The overnights also indicate immediately whether a new program has "taken off" and captured a sizable audience in the urban markets. Advertising agencies also use the overnight numbers to make predictions about specific shows that then become the basis of ratings expectations (and sales rates).

For example, when *Smallville* first started, it was predicted to get a share of 3 but actually got a 7, thus making it a hit, even though its subsequent ratings were at the bottom for all series. Since that time, its DVD sales have made its rating almost irrelevant, as it has run for 10 years, never getting more than a 4. Indeed, CW was almost in a panic as it finally announced the series would end in 2011. Missing the predicted number (getting one much lower than expected) in the overnights during the first few weeks of a newly introduced program's run spells cancellation unless the ratings show a hint of growth—or unless the program is expected to have stronger appeal to a specific audience. *JAG* was canceled by NBC but picked up and run successfully by CBS, which argued that it had a strong rural and male appeal not represented in the city-based overnight ratings. CBS was subsequently proven right. Recently, when *Friday Night Lights* was dropped by broadcasting, it was picked up by cable and run successfully.

Sometimes international appeal is a factor in letting a show build an audience. For example, *Prison Break* was only a moderate rating success for FOX, but it showed strong international potential and offered a racially diversified cast during a year with little other racial diversity in prime time. Thus, *Prison Break* was renewed while higher-rated series were canceled. In 2010, *Hawaii 5-0* found itself in much the same situation. It was not high in the ratings, but its international syndication potential seems to be very high so it was proclaimed a hit.

Still other shows that are cheap to produce but have no aftermarket potential may be held because the shows' concepts are so valuable. For example, *Big Brother* has always had ratings of about 2 or 3 for CBS, hardly great numbers. But the show is inexpensive to make, and the concept has been sold to producers in other countries, who use the same program idea and title but staff the house with people from their own countries. In Brazil, for instance, *Big Brother* is one of the highest-rated programs, and the contestants are considered major stars. While most game, reality and talent shows have no life after their first run, either as DVDs, off-network syndication or network reruns, the concept may have value and be syndicatable. Programs like *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*?, *Deal Or No Deal*, *Dancing With The Stars*, *The Bachelor* or *Survivor* had no value to the international market as programs, but had great value as ideas. When syndicated, the other country actually produces it. While the money may not come directly to the network, it still comes to the parent company. Of course the money for traditional off-network syndication never came directly to the network either. And the process reverses: NBC bought the idea for *Voice* from non-U.S. sources. (Simply stealing the show, as Norman Lear did with *All In The Family,* is no longer an option.)

Other series, such as *The West Wing* and *Bones,* were only moderate rating performers but generated strong critical and special-interest appeal and thus remained on the schedule, giving them time to grow into true rating success stories, which led to big sales as DVD sets (and long runs on cable for *Bones*). Still other programs, such as *Heroes,* were designed to run on both a broadcast network and a cable network at the same time, requiring advertisers to predict combined ratings/shares. Some programs like *Monk* were not designed for running on both cable and broadcasting but have because parent companies try to double the value of an unexpected success.

Even though the ability to accurately predict the numbers, especially for new series, is very low, advertising agency predictions still have tremendous power. For example, during the 1999–00 season, advertisers predicted *Secret Agent Man* would get barely a 2 share. As a result, the series was canceled without airing even one episode. Who knows? Given a chance, the audience might have turned to it as they did to the summer surprise hits *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* and *Survivor* (the first one), both of which were predicted to generate ratings so low they didn't even get a regular season start. On the other hand, the same agency experts predicted that *Coupling* would be one of the highest-rated new series in 2003–04. It certainly did not live up to that prediction.

Pocketpieces and MNA Reports

The ratings report traditionally of greatest interest to the *creative* community, and the one most familiar to the public, is published every other week in a small booklet known as *The Nielsen Pocketpiece* (see 2.8). It comes from the 12,000 national people-meter households selected to match census demographic guidelines for the entire country. Though this information is published only every other week, these data are available to Nielsen subscribers via computer the next day. A data bank provides, upon request, data not only for the nine major broadcast networks but also for selected cable networks.

As 2.8 shows, more than 11 million people watched CBS's *Cold Case* that Sunday from 8:15 to 9:15, and the program's average rating for the hour was 10.5 with a share of 15. At the same

2.8 Sample Pocketpiece Page

A-16 NATIONAL *NielsenTV* AUDIENCE ESTIMATES EVE.SUN. OCT.17, 2004

TIME	7:00	7:15	7:30	7:45	8:00	8:15	8:30	8:45	9:00	9:15	9:30	9:45	10:00	10:15	10:30	10:45	11:00	11:15
HUT	57.1	58.5	60.0	61.9	64.2	65.3	66.5	68.2	68.8	69.6	69.7	69.7	67.4	65.1	62.5	60.4	55.6	51.2
ABC TV	←AMER FUNN HOME VIDEOS→				←EXTREME MAKEOVER:HM-ED-8P→				←DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES (9:00-10:01)→				←BOSTON LEGAL (10:01-11:00)(PAE)→					
HHLD AUDIENCE% & (000)	4.6	5,020			8.8	9,670			13.1	14,340			7.3	8,010				
TA%, AVG. AUD. 1/2 HR %	*7.5*	4.0*		5.1*	*12.6*	7.9*		9.8*	*17.3*	12.4*		13.7*	*10.2*	7.5*		7.1*		
SHARE AUDIENCE %	8	7*		8*	13	12*		14*	19	18*		20*	12	11*		12*		
AVG. AUD. BY 1/4 HR %	3.7	4.4	4.8	5.4	7.3	8.4	9.1	10.5	12.1	12.7	13.5	14.0	8.0	7.1	7.1	7.1		
CBS TV	(1)	←60 MINUTES (7:23-8:23)(PAE)→				←COLD CASE (8:23-9:23)(PAE)→				←CBS SUNDAY MOVIE PERFECT STRANGERS (9:23-11:23)(PAE)→								
HHLD AUDIENCE% & (000)		11.1	12,120			10.5	11,460			5.3	5,840							
TA%, AVG. AUD. 1/2 HR %		*18.8*		10.6*		*14.3*		10.2*		*10.7*		5.3*		5.2*		5.0*		5.5*
SHARE AUDIENCE %		18		17*		15		15*		8		8*		8*		8*		10*
AVG. AUD. BY 1/4 HR %	14.6	9.7	10.5	10.8	12.5	10.3	10.1	10.4	10.9	6.6	5.6	5.1	5.2	5.2	5.0	5.0	5.6	5.4
NBC TV	←DATELINE SUN-7PM→				←AMERICAN DREAMS→				←LAW AND ORDER:CRIM INTENT→				←CROSSING JORDAN→					
HHLD AUDIENCE% & (000)	5.1	5,560			4.3	4,750			8.2	8,970			8.5	9,320				
TA%, AVG. AUD. 1/2 HR %	*9.2*	4.8*		5.4*	*6.2*	4.3*		4.3*	*11.3*	7.2*		9.1*	*11.0*	8.4*		8.6*		
SHARE AUDIENCE %	9	8*		9*	7	7*		6*	12	10*		13*	13	13*		14*		
AVG. AUD. BY 1/4 HR %	4.4	5.1	5.3	5.4	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.4	6.5	7.9	8.9	9.4	8.4	8.4	8.7	8.5		
FOX TV		(2)			(3)	←FOX MLB ALCS GAME 4 NEW YORK YANKEES AT BOSTON (8:17-1:23)(PAE)→												
HHLD AUDIENCE% & (000)						9.5	10,440											
TA%, AVG. AUD. 1/2 HR %		7.4*				*24.8*		9.7*		9.2*		9.1*		10.8*		10.1*		9.1*
SHARE AUDIENCE %		13*				17		15*		14*		13*		16*		16*		16*
AVG. AUD. BY 1/4 HR %	6.9	7.8	9.2			8.5	9.6	9.8	9.4	9.0	8.9	9.4	11.4	10.2	10.6	9.6	9.5	8.6
WB TV	←S HARVEY BIG TIME - WB→				←CHARMED - WB→				←JACK & BOBBY - WB→									
HHLD AUDIENCE% & (000)	1.5	1,670			3.0	3,330			1.4	1,580								
TA%, AVG. AUD. 1/2 HR %	*3.0*	1.4*		1.7*	*4.1*	3.0*		3.1*	*2.1*	1.5*		1.4*						
SHARE AUDIENCE %	3	2*		3*	5	5*		5*	2	2*		2*						
AVG. AUD. BY 1/4 HR %	1.2	1.6	1.5	1.8	2.8	3.2	3.1	3.1	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.4						
PAX TV	←AMR MOST TAL KIDS-PAX→				←DOC-SUN→				←SUE THOMAS, F.B. EYE→				←COLD TURKEY→				(PAE)	
HHLD AUDIENCE% & (000)	0.5	560			1.0	1,050			0.9	1,010			0.3	350				
TA%, AVG. AUD. 1/2 HR %	*1.0*	0.4*		0.6*	*1.3*	0.9*		1.0*	*1.3*	0.9*		0.9*	*0.6*	0.4*		0.3*		
SHARE AUDIENCE %	1	1*		1*	1	1*		1*	1	1*		1*	0	1*				
AVG. AUD. BY 1/4 HR %	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3		

U.S. TV Households: 109,600,000

(1) CBS NFL NATIONAL,VARIOUS TEAMS AND TIMES,CBS,(MULTI SEGMENT)(PAE)

(2) FOX MLB NLCS GAME 4,ST LOUIS AT HOUSTON,FOX,(S),(4:38-7:41)(PAE)

(3) FOX MLB ALCS GM4 PRE-SUS,NEW YORK YANKEES AT BOSTON,FOX,(7:47-8:17)(SUS)(PAE)

For explanation of symbols. See page B.

A-17 For SPANISH LANGUAGE TELEVISION audience estimates, see the Nielsen Hispanic Television Index (NHTI) TV Audience Report.

time, more than 10 million people watched FOX's Major League Baseball game, getting a rating of 9.5 and a share of 17 or so for that 8:15 to 9:15 P.M. hour of the game. ABC also did well with *Extreme Makeover: Households,* watched by nearly 9 million people; that show got a rating of 8.8 and a share of 13. NBC did less well in the competition, attracting just under 5 million people to *American Dreams* that week. The show got a rating of 4.3 and a share of 7. Just over 3 million people watched WB's *Charmed,* and it got a rating of 3.0 and a share of 5 (quite satisfactory for WB, now called the CW). The rating for the series *Doc* on PAX (now called ION) averaged about a 1.0, with about a 1 share.

At present, Nielsen is handling almost 1,300 computer requests for pocket-piece data monthly, suggesting that its people-meter data may eventually replace or diminish the importance of the overnights. Unlike the urban nature of the overnights, the pocketpiece provides estimates for the entire nation, including ratings/shares and the all-important demographics for both prime time and daytime, plus general information such as average ratings by program type, number of sets in use by days and by dayparts, comparison of television usage between the current season and the one preceding, and other details.

Network programmers also find Nielsen's *Multi-Network Area Report* (MNA) very useful. The statistics in this report cover the 70 leading population centers in the country, represent about two-thirds of total television homes nationally, and break out the O&O markets. The networks use MNA reports to compare the performance of the major networks without the distortion caused by the one- and two-affiliate markets included in the national Nielsen reports (although few now exist). *MNA reports include the so-essential demographic breakouts and give the networks figures related to their owned stations without distortion from smaller markets where they have no ownership interests.*

As network ratings have fallen, the way the networks report them has also changed. Very few press releases or promotional materials actually refer to the ratings or shares anymore. Rather, they report the millions of people who viewed something (the rating times 2.6). They point to the percentage increase over last year, a show's first-place position in a time slot, the percentage of the ideal audience it captures, and so on—anything but the actual rating numbers, which are usually dismal. A decade ago programmers joked that the ratings books were designed to be complicated so that any programmer could find something that he or she was doing right. Now they keep the ratings a secret. Nielsen permits the ratings for only the top 25 programs to be reported in the press.

Prime-Time Scheduling Practices

The entire process of prime-time programming breaks down into three major phases: *deciding to keep or cancel already scheduled series, developing and choosing new programs* from the ideas proposed for the coming season, and *scheduling the entire group*. To understand program evaluation, selection and scheduling, the changing concept of a season needs to be spelled out.

Shifting Network Seasons

From the 1950s to the present, the main viewing year has periodically expanded or contracted until it settled on *40 weeks, usually running from late September to the end of May*. The remaining 12 weeks (*off-season*) occur in summer. Production cost increases combined with a high mortality rate decreased the size of episode orders for renewed series to 20 or 22 episodes by the 1990s, filling in the season with specials and reruns.

Nowadays, ABC, CBS and NBC tend to order just 6 to 10 episodes at a time, although occasional 22-episode guaranties are given to capture a high-profile producer or star. And network contracts now say "cancelable any time" (although Charlie Sheen sued claiming they had no right to cancel *Two and a Half Men*, or rather to cancel him, as CBS continued with the series). Even having 22 episodes fails to cover the May sweeps; but these sweeps are important to affiliated stations while being too expensive for the networks to fill with specials.

Because the network license fee gives the right to two showings of each episode for the one payment, and because the networks need to get their money's worth out of every episode, for the last decade reruns have begun early and often. They are usually scheduled at the end of the fall season in December (no ratings then) and between the February and May sweeps. Traditionally, weaker episodes used to be rerun in summers, but *the need to fill 40 weeks has resulted in reruns of nearly all episodes during the main viewing year*, with episodes of quickly canceled series, new pilots and original reality series saved for summers.

Specials, sports and limited-run tryouts fill the remaining weeks of the regular season. However, the definition of a "special" has become extremely loose. During a recent season, specials included rejected pilots, such fluff shows as ABC's *21 Hottest Stars Under 21,* and so-called news specials that were indistinguishable from the regular news magazines and reality shows.

It used to be that placing a program on *hiatus* (a rest or break) meant that it was awaiting cancellation. Over the decades, a few series came back from a hiatus with a new actor or plot line, and stayed on the schedule, but most just disappeared. Nowadays, if a series has 22 episodes to air, original episodes end before Christmas and then return in February or March to run without interruptions to the season finales in May sweeps.

Another option for filling gaps in the schedule is *stripping,* which refers to scheduling episodes of a program, usually a magazine series like *NBC Dateline,* on several different days across the week. This practice has not seemed to harm the numbers for news format shows, but it killed *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* as a network show. However, after a hiatus of a year *Millionaire* returned as a syndicated series, and later went back on ABC as a special. In more limited form, stripping has been employed with such situation comedies as *Till Death, Scrubs, Reba* and *That 70's Show,* and with such reality shows as *Next Top Model, Survivor* and *Nanny 911,* which often run two and sometimes three times a week. FOX dose this regularly with *American Idol* and *Dancing With The Stars*.

Limited Series

Starting back in the 1990s, the networks began interrupting the regular season with tryouts of new series in strong prime-time slots. March, April and the summer months became tryout months for *limited series* (generally four to six episodes). This off-and-on method of scheduling allows the networks to test a new program under the best possible conditions while preserving original episodes of the most popular series for the May sweeps.

Whether inserting a new series into the ongoing prime-time schedule is an effective strategy is debatable. *New shows usually get highly inflated ratings while in a popular show's time slot, but such ratings seldom hold up when new show moves into their much weaker permanent slots.* At the same time, constantly interrupting a popular show tends to cause its ratings to go down. Series tried out during the summer months suffer from the opposite effect. Because summer ratings are so low, even if a program significantly improves ratings for the slot, the absolute quantity of viewers seldom looks good, and the usual result is quick cancellation.

Many reality series, including *American Idol* and *Dancing with the Stars,* however, were planned as limited-run series scheduled during sweeps weeks. Having only a few episodes reduces production costs and allows the producers to stage much publicized tryouts around the country (that people pay to watch and participate in) between actual runs of the program. *Survivor* now follows the same year-round tryout scheme, but was originally a limited summer series.

In truth, *the majority of new series are aired first in limited-run experiments, not pilots.* The majority of new programs tried by ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX run for fewer than eight weeks. In contrast, UNI, TEL and the CW tend to leave new series on for a full season, but some programmers argue that this stems not from a different philosophy but from a lack of the money required to constantly develop replacements. (MNTV and TEF carry mostly rerun entertainment series.)

Programmers argue that limited-run series in all seasons are the wave of the future. They point to the success of such cable programs as *Monk* and *The Sopranos,* which ran 8 to 12 weeks, went off, and then came back later for another 8 to 12 weeks. This allowed cable programmers to stretch the run of the popular original series into the summer months, when they often wiped out the networks in the ratings.

However, as with most things concerning the networks, the situation is not quite that simple. In broadcasting, the combination game/reality formula used in *Celebrity Apprentice, Survivor, The Amazing Race* and *American Idol* forces programmers into a scattered scheduling approach. A new game has to start and run its course as one person is thrown off the show each week, and then end the game. It then takes several weeks to get the next episode of the game ready for broadcast. Something has to fill the weeks between the main reality series, so why not use another cheap reality game and then alternate them back and forth in the schedule? In cable, programmers used the broken-run strategy largely because they could not afford a full 22 episodes. They needed the money from the first run to produce the second run. This scattered approach to scheduling helped disguise the fact that there weren't very many original episodes being produced.

Network-planned limited runs of such high-cost series as *Lost* serve much the same purpose. Limiting the number of episodes produced each season keeps production costs down and produces revenue to support more production. Theoretically, this type of scheduling also builds anticipation in the audience, allowing a network to promote an upcoming series almost like a special event that hypes the ratings during sweeps weeks. ABC shocked many fans in 2007 by announcing *Lost's* end date of 2010, after a six-season run. The producers claimed that fans deserved the security of knowing that all the show's convoluted storylines would play out fully as intended.

Summer Schedules

In the late 1980s, the networks began using March and April, as well as summer, for testing new program ideas in short runs and airing rejected pilots that did not make the fall schedule. (Previously, these pilots would never have been seen by anyone outside the network programming department.) By the 1990s, not only were network ratings down but the costs for program development were so high that the networks could no longer absorb the expense of the development stages for new shows that never reached the air.

Summer became the arena for reruns of weak series episodes or episodes of quickly canceled series that were paid for but never used, and for episodes of never-scheduled shows or reruns of canceled series. *Running pilots as made-for-TV movies, summer specials, and short-run tests of series became three ways to recoup much of a network's investment.* By 2007, the networks had begun to repeat their top shows on Saturday nights, further exhausting their rerun potential for summers.

However, the practices of doubling, tripling and stripping episodes during the regular season, combined with airing many unscripted series, which cannot be successfully rerun, began leaving little that was fresh for the summer months. Indeed, the neglect of the summers by ABC, CBS and NBC made them a gold mine for the cable networks, which began killing the broadcast networks in the summer ratings. In addition, the affiliated stations worried about the extreme ratings drops during July sweeps.

FOX further complicated the picture when it discovered that summer was a good time to get people to sample series they did not normally watch. This network was able to build an audience for several of its regular series by continuing original episodes into summer, which were supported by active promotional campaigns. To take advantage of the potential for discovering its shows, FOX began heavily promoting its reruns as a "second chance to see what you have been missing." FOX's success was later copied by NBC in its "New to you" promotion that emphasized the fact that "if you haven't seen it, the program is new to you." By the early 2000s, this strategy was sufficiently successful to force the other networks to pay more attention to their summer schedules. Most networks now schedule at least one or two new series during the summer, although none seems intended to continue during the main season.

Even when a summer series generated a lot of talk or higher-than-expected ratings, as was the case with the short-run FOX series *Roar,* the show was dropped the minute September rolled around.

Until the breakthrough by extremely cheap unscripted (this doesn't mean no writers, it just means no union writers) series like *Survivor,* even when a summer series outperformed expectations, it was seldom picked up. Programmers generally wrote these offerings off before they ever went on the air. As a result, a show must break all records to get attention from programmers who have already moved on to next season's planning.

The original *Survivor* on CBS, which ran only during the summer of 2000, was such a surprise megahit. It spawned several **clones** (look-alike shows) for the subsequent season (*Temptation Island, The Mole* and *Big Brother*), and then *American Idol,* a summer copy of a British series, did the same thing for FOX. Suddenly summer was seen as the time to try reality series. *With the advent of original summer schedules and the promotion of reruns as original programming for people who normally watched the competition, the July ratings books took on more importance as a measure of network and pay-cable pull, as a limited vehicle for pre-fall testing, and incidentally, as a way to satisfy affiliates.*

Premieres

Traditionally, the networks premiered their new series during a much-publicized week in late September. However, in 2004, because of the late summer Olympics, the networks declared the end of fall premieres as such. The reality is that series have debuted in scattershot fashion for the last decade, usually throughout September and October (and occasionally as early as August or as late as November).

Theoretically, spreading out the premieres keeps new programs from getting lost in the rush, gives viewers maximum opportunity to sample each new network show, and accommodates interruptions caused by baseball playoffs, the World Series and other major events such as the Olympics. In fact, spreading out "premiere week" has diminished the excitement associated with a new season and actually reduced the sampling of new shows. For example, viewers who find an appealing show at a certain hour in early September are unlikely to check out new shows when they debut some weeks later at the same hour. Viewers also won't stay around (or come back) when a new show they like vanishes for several weeks while the network stunts. *As a rule, fans of comedy will find another comedy at that hour and stick with it; fans of drama will become loyal to another drama.*

In addition, a large number of new network programs, particularly replacement shows, begin their runs in January or February, thus creating a **second season** on the networks. By late fall each year, the fate of most prime-time programs already on the air has become clear. Holiday specials usually preempt those destined for cancellation or restructuring, while more popular series go into reruns and special holiday episodes, which are often cut together pieces of earlier episodes with a loose plot—such as characters are trying to remember something—to tie them together.

By January or February the networks are ready to launch their second seasons—with almost the same amount of promotion and ballyhoo as are accorded the new season premieres in September or October. Nonetheless, they then promptly preempt the new schedule to promote and run special programming for the February sweeps, and then they introduce more new series in March. As a result, it is hard to argue that there are clear seasons any longer. Rather, network programming has become a round of constant changes. As a strategy, this is called the **continuous season** approach. Indeed, back in 2009, NBC said there were no more seasons, and the others have adopted the same practices. Schedule changes are occurring every week.

Program Renewal

Evaluation of on-air shows goes on all year. *The critical times for new programs starting are before the sweeps in November, February, May and July; those doing badly during sweeps are then quickly replaced before the next sweeps occur*. The final decision on whether to return an iffy program to the schedule the following fall is usually made between March and May because the networks showcase their fall lineups at their annual affiliates meetings during those months and up-front sales begin. Last-minute changes, however, occur right up to the opening guns in the fall.

Program Lifespan

The average *lifespan* of popular prime-time series has declined steadily over time. In the 1950s and 1960s, such shows as *The Ed Sullivan Show, Gunsmoke, What's My Line?* and *The Wonderful World of Disney* endured for more than 20 years. These records for longevity will probably never be matched again in prime time—with the exceptions of news magazines and cartoons like *The Simpsons*. By 1980, a program lifespan of 10 years was regarded as a phenomenon. By the 1990s, 5 years was an outstanding run for a successful series.

A decade later, because the networks became the producers, they gained a vested interest in the longevity of their programs. Series such as *Smallville, Supernatural*, *NCIS, 7th Heaven* and *Law and Order* are now moving back toward 10-year lifespans. The networks have become very reluctant to cancel anything that succeeds, even modestly, if they can make a profit from it.

Several factors accounted for this shortened lifespan:

1. Above all, the high cost of renewing writers, directors and actors after an initial contract expires
2. The increased sophistication or, some argue, the shortened attention span of the viewing audience
3. The constant media coverage of television shows and stars (as in *Entertainment Tonight, People* and *Us* magazines, the morning talk shows and so on), which wears out each series idea quickly
4. The practice of syndicating a series while it continues its network run, of releasing DVD sets, and of doubling and tripling (or other overusing while on the network), which leads to burnout
5. The scarcity of outstanding program forms and fresh, top-rated production and writing talent, as well as a network propensity for formulaic series, which leads to a great deal of copying and very low levels of originality
6. The loss of key actors because they become bored or move on to other projects
7. The move toward the cloning of prime-time hits, which results in a sameness that causes even the best ideas to wear out faster

The shortened lifespan of prime-time series reflects the complexity of program license contracts that generally ran for five to seven years. Each new episode of a program is assigned a *license fee*, whether the show is produced by the same company that owns the network intending to carry the program or another entity. The license fee size varies with cost factors such as costumes, special effects, sets, stunt work, the amount of location versus studio shooting, cast size, the producers' and stars' reputations, the program's track record, the demand for series in the same genre and so on. Traditionally, this cost represented about three-quarters of the actual cost of production and told the executive producers how much they were going to have to kick in to actually make the program.

When a series first makes it to the air, the network controls the contractual situation and usually requires several concessions from everyone involved. At this time, the producer commonly has to sign over such rights as creative control, spin-off rights, limitations on syndication and scheduling control. Everyone also agrees to a specific licensing fee for the run of the five-year contract, regardless of the program's success (after all, most shows fail). Typically, this licensing fee makes no concession for sharing the profits should the program become a hit. However, when the producer and the network now work for the same corporation, the leverage lies with the parent company (see 2.9).

Pivotal Numbers

Choosing which programs already on the air will continue and which will be pulled (renewals and

2.9 License Contracts

Traditionally, producers practice *deficit financing* (paying more to produce a series than the network pays in license fees) because the potential profit from off-network syndication can run into the hundreds of millions of dollars. If a show is a hit, the producers can make up any losses. Producers typically agree to licensing contracts lower than actual production costs in order to get their shows onto the networks so they have chances to be hits.

For those few shows that really succeeded, in the old days, at the end of the first contractual period (normally five years), the tables were turned: Now the producers and stars enjoyed the advantage because the series had a *track record*. In short, if the network wanted to keep making the series, concessions would have to be granted, usually in the form of much higher salaries or bigger shares in profits for the producers. *Friends* illustrated this dilemma when the stars each demanded $1 million an episode in 2003–04 even before any other salaries or production costs were figured.

Under such renewal conditions, a network could sometimes profit by dropping a popular show. But because finding hits has been so difficult, the networks generally decide it's better to give in rather than have another huge hole open up in their schedules. For example, NBC did bite the bullet with the moderate hit *ER*, paying $13 million per episode for one year just to keep this centerpiece for its Thursday night schedule.

The repeal of the financial interest rule, however, meant that the networks could (and do) now own the programs. Because the network is itself the producer, tables don't turn so completely (oh, actors can still get pushy, and the unions can cause trouble, as they did during the 2008 season), but all costs and profits belong to the same corporation, giving it enormous leverage over salaries and profit sharing. Although deficit financing is still practiced for tax purposes, it occurs between arms of the same company. One outcome of the new power relationship is that the networks seem to hold the few big hits longer even as cancellations for new series come quicker.

cancellations) is perhaps the easiest decision network programmers have. The decisions are based squarely on the network's *profit margin*—in essence, subtracting the cost per episode from advertising revenue. *Normally, revenue has been directly related to ratings*. Until the 1980s, a weeknight rating below 20 (or an audience share of less than 30) almost always resulted in a program's cancellation on any network. But because of steady network audience erosion, by the mid-2000s, the Big Four's numbers had plummeted to a *minimum weekday prime-time rating of 4 and a share of 9*.

If the profit margin is high enough, such as with CBS's series *Big Brother,* a show will be retained with even lower numbers. Thus, *profitability is the source of the power of reality programs*. A few, such as *American Idol,* have high ratings numbers, but most do far worse than hour-long dramas. But typically, unscripted shows are incredibly cheap to produce, making the profit margins enormous.

Entertainment series stalling in the bottom third of the Nielsens are usually canceled as soon as possible, while programs in the top third are usually renewed. The most difficult decisions for network programmers involve programs in the middle third—*the borderline cases*—or programs that

1. are weakening but are nearing their fifth year.
2. are only just beginning to slide in the ratings.
3. are highly rated but draw the wrong demographics.
4. produce low ratings but draw a high percentage within a desirable demographic group.
5. have low ratings but high profit margins.
6. produce strong critical approval but marginal ratings.

Occasionally, the personal preferences of a top network executive, the reaction from critics, letter-writing campaigns or an advertiser's support may influence a decision, but the prevailing view is that *cancellations had far better come too soon and too often than too late*. Indeed, network programmers insist that advertisers and corporate headquarters will not tolerate a program that doesn't offer instant success.

Replacement series, however, rarely do significantly better than the original programs in the ratings (see 2.10), and they push development prices even higher. Therefore, large group owners occasionally pressure their networks to hold on to problematic shows. Group owners can affect cancellation decisions, as can direct participation from key sponsors, but this happens only rarely. For example, in 2003 Procter and Gamble pulled its advertisements (purchased during the up-front buying) from *Family Law,* saying the content was not what the company had been promised. As a result, CBS was forced to pull the offending episodes from the rerun schedule. In addition, the O&Os can affect a decision because they report to the same parent corporation. Such pressure can be positive (to hold) or negative (to kill).

More than the other networks, FOX and CW seem less traditional and readier to look for potential profits outside those generated by advertising. They are more likely to keep shows with strong off-network syndication or DVD sales potential, and seek shows with potential for non-direct sales from tours or music sales and on-demand or internet revenues.

Program Costs

In addition to ratings, profits left after subtracting licensing costs from advertising revenues influence program cancellations. Two prime-time programs of the same length, on the same network, with identical ratings will, ideally, produce identical amounts of revenue for that network. If, however, one of them has slightly higher per-episode licensing costs, say as little as $100,000 an episode, over the length of a season that difference would equal just over $2 million more in costs. It is clear that the program with the higher licensing cost will be canceled before the lower-cost series. In recent years, the networks have scheduled more program genres with low production costs—witness the proliferation of news magazines and reality shows in prime time.

Nonetheless, unexpected megahits like *Survivor* and *American Idol* have led programmers to promote "the new reality revolution" because of the genre's low cost, in spite of disastrous rerun numbers and no syndication potential. Currently, a new reality show costs at least $1,500,000 per episode. Even such megahits as *Survivor* cost only about $3 million per episode, whereas the price tag for an episode of *Two and a Half Men* is close to $20 million. (Original cable series cost much less than the broadcast equivalent because they are done in non-union shops outside of California.)

Because the company controlling the network now usually owns the production, it has to cover all costs, so the fee itself is largely irrelevant except to the accountants at tax time. For accounting purposes, the license fee is still used to allocate the actual cost of production to various departments, and it tells the network how much it has to earn during first run and then during rerun to break even. How networks allocate these costs varies enormously and largely depends on what will generate the lowest tax bill at the end of the year. At present, one of the biggest cost factors is how a program is produced from a technical standpoint (see 2.11).

Because there are only a limited number of top producers and writers for any given genre, especially high demand for a particular type of show forces costs up. By 2012, the fee for a successful reality series had gone up almost 400 percent but was still far below the cost for any other type of programming (with the exception of news magazines like *20/20*).

A show's potential for profits in syndication also affects how high its license fee can go. Action hours have traditionally been expensive to produce but have been highly syndicatable in both the domestic and international markets. They are also highly desirable for the parent companies' own cable networks. However, following the takeover of most independent production houses, the number of original action series dried up. In 2004–05 there were only three action hours available in syndication, *Andromeda, Stargate SG1* and *Mutant X*. By 2007, no original action hours were on the market. In 2008, only one new series, *Legend of the Seeker,* was offered. It was produced in New Zealand, but distributed through Disney (ABC). For the broadcast

2.10 Time Slot Ratings

The history of ratings for the time slot a program fills may be the strongest measure of how that program will perform. After all, a "history" takes into account such factors as the competition, the leads in and out on all channels, the network's myths and policies, and the public's viewing habits and expectations. The reality is that more than 80 percent of the series scheduled in new time slots (new or moved shows) do not alter either the ratings or the ranking for their slots significantly. This means that a series placed in a top-rated time slot probably will be a top-rated series, and conversely, a series placed in a weak position will be weak.

The majority of the remaining shows get lower ratings than their time slot averaged in the previous season. This means that when a series does change the historical pattern, the change is usually for the worse. Chances are less than 5 percent that a program will significantly improve the ratings for the time slot even at the generally accepted 68 percent level (one standard deviation rather than the two normally used in research).

Low-rated shows are subject to a widely accepted condition called *double jeopardy*. According to this idea, low-rated shows have both low exposure and little chance of getting more exposure. This is because popular programs are chosen by more people, and those viewers are more committed to the shows. Thus, unpopular programs suffer from increasingly fewer and less-committed viewers.

Obviously the best scheduling ploy would be to place every series in an already strong position, an impossibility in programming. The slots open to programmers are usually ones where previous programs failed. In the last 20 or so years, more than half of all new shows have been scheduled in prime-time slots that already ranked in the bottom third of the ratings, and most were also in slots ranked third compared to the competition. Clearly, *the strength of a time slot should be considered when the decision is made to hold or cancel a series.*

This, however, has not usually been the case at the networks: *In practice, a program's rank and absolute rating overrule expectations for a time slot.* As a result, a series with a 9 rating would usually be held, while a series with a 4 would be cancelled, even if that 9 represented a loss of several points (by comparison with the lead-in program or the previous program in that slot) and the 4 represented a gain. Because there is only a small chance that a series will significantly improve the ratings for a time slot, considering ranking an absolute rating appears to be self-defeating in the long run.

Because the majority of available slots are going to be weak in any case, wisdom suggests holding onto series that improve the numbers and slowly rebuilding holes in the schedule would be sound practices. Because a short replacement series is very unlikely to do any better and is expensive to develop, common sense would also seem to advocate holding onto new programs longer to give them time to build audiences. After all, *Seinfeld* generated ratings of only 11 and 12 during its first year (which now seems incredibly high, but stunk back then), losing badly to *Home Improvement*. Nonetheless, the pattern of the three major networks has been "decide quickly" and "cancel fast."

2.11 Production Methods

According to data from NATPE, as of 2005, physically producing a program on film (not including the cost of talent) ran about $1,000 per minute. Tape was less expensive but still around half that cost. Producing the program digitally—using a digital camera and a computer for editing, special effects, and so on—ran about $7,000 for 45 minutes of high-definition product (less than $100 for minute). *This enormous cost differential—about one-fifth the cost of film—drove the high-definition revolution in Hollywood.*

networks, this meant a lucrative part of the syndication market had evaporated in less than five years. This part of the market has been taken over by cable which is now relied on for almost all hour-long syndicated product.

Crime dramas then surfaced as a means to fill network schedules at a somewhat lower cost than action hours, resulting in schedules full of *Law & Order* and *CSI* look-alikes. Although the network studios were cranking out afternoon talk shows and judges banging various gavels, they were generating few dramas outside of crime and lawyer shows. (The main exception was *The Mentalist*, the success of which gave rise to a handful of "psych" shows.) At the same time, the networks were having no luck producing new hit sitcoms, resulting in a certain amount of panic in the syndication market.

New Program Selection

Phase two in planning a new fall season—selection and development of new program ideas—poses more difficult problems than ongoing program evaluation. The four networks consider as many as 6,000 new submissions every year. These submissions vary from single-page outlines to completed scripts that come from writers or producers. *Decision makers favor ideas resembling previously or presently successful shows.* They even quietly agree that almost all so-called original successes are in fact patterned after long-forgotten programs. *American Idol,* for example is just the *Original Amateur Hour* with a snotty Ted Mack. *Glee* merges the musical with a dramatic series, a modestly innovative idea, copying a Disney cable movie and *7 Brides for 7 Brothers,* the last broadcast effort.

One year, NBC promoted its move toward new and daring ideas with *Titans,* described as a "quirky yarn about a big city lawyer returning to his hometown in Ohio," despite this being the same plot as *Providence, Judging Amy* and *Ed*. But then, none of the other networks have been any more original.

The newest way of generating additional network programs is *franchise programming*—cloning an hour-long series into several more programs with only minor changes. Originality has never been a big selling point for broadcasters, but franchising programs creates extreme sameness because a franchised show merely has a different cast and perhaps location. By the mid-2000s, *CSI* had been cloned to three different cities (Las Vegas, Miami and New York) and blended with *JAG* to form *NCIS*. *Law & Order* had added a *Special Victims Unit* and *Criminal Intent,* and followed them with even more analysis in *Criminal Minds*. People were only half joking when they suggested that next we would have *Law & Order: SUV* where the characters would investigate crimes from large sponsor-placed vehicles.

Over at FOX, they were working on turning *American Idol* into a **franchise** by changing music styles or featuring contestants of different ages. For network programmers, franchising has three enormous advantages:

1. Generating hour-long programs for foreign syndication or whose premise can be syndicated internationally
2. Reducing decision making for new series ideas
3. Creating signature programs to be identified with a network, thus helping to set it apart from other program suppliers

Viewers have generally had to look to cable for fresh ideas in such programs as *Six Feet Under, Nip/Tuck, Burn Notice, Warehouse 13* and so on. But the most popular cable shows are sometimes reused on sister broadcast networks, as was the case with *Monk* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. This double scheduling of the same show is called repurposing and goes both ways. For example, NBC ran all three versions of *Law & Order* on its co-owned USA and later syndicated the original series to TNT. It also ran *Heroes* on the co-owned Syfy Channel. In fact, the entire SOAPnet channel seemed to be a way for ABC to rerun its afternoon soap operas at night for women who work during the day. One has to wonder what will happen to it now that ABC is down to one soap opera. But *Heroes* proved so popular with younger viewers that NBC broke the "avoid sci-fi" rule in 2008 and experimented with *Journeyman, Bionic Woman* and (unbelievably) the weird *Chuck*.

Program Concepts and Scripts

Many program concepts are dismissed out of hand; others are read and reread, only to be shelved temporarily—or even permanently when a network is worried that the idea might possibly be a hit but won't take the chance and doesn't want anyone else to chance it. A few, usually variations on present hits or linked to top stars or producers, get a favorable nod with dispatch. Such big-name directors as Barry Levinson, Oprah Winfrey or Rob Reiner are courted and given contracts to develop anything they want, but without promises to actually run the shows. *The networks fight desperately to find that immediate hit that will pull in a young audience.*

Of the thousands of submissions that land on the networks' desks, roughly 600 are chosen for further development. At this point, all parties sign a *step deal*, a contract providing development funds in stages to the producer. In the past, a step deal also set compensation rates if the show were successful and gave the network creative control, which are still important when a show is not wholly owned by one network.

As a rule, step deals authorize s*cripts* or, in some cases, expanded *treatments*. The approved concepts often take first form as special programs, made-for-TV movies or, increasingly, test characters in established shows. For example, the characters Green Arrow and Aquaman were introduced in *Smallville,* both of which became strong contenders for their own series. In the end, the CW decided to keep them part of *Smallville*, but that may now change as that show has ended its run. If a concept was submitted initially in script form, a rewrite may be ordered with specific recommendations for changes in concept, plot or cast (and even new writers and in some cases, producers).

Until recently, ABC traditionally supported many more program ideas at this stage than CBS, NBC or FOX, but ratings shifts have led first CBS and then NBC to allot more money to develop new program ideas. *The network that has recently dropped the most in the prime-time ratings is always the hungriest for fresh ideas and the most willing to risk trying them.*

Before authorizing any production, the program executive will first order one or more *full scripts* and a *bible*. Nowadays, a network typically pays about \$50,000 for a half-hour comedy script and \$70,000 for a one-hour drama script. Exceptional (read *successful*) writers demand much higher prices. The bible outlines characters and their relationships, suggests sets that will be needed, and summarizes future script ideas or the way the program can develop during its proposed run. At this stage, the producer also looks for production locations—at least for the pilot—outside of California.

Advances and Pilots

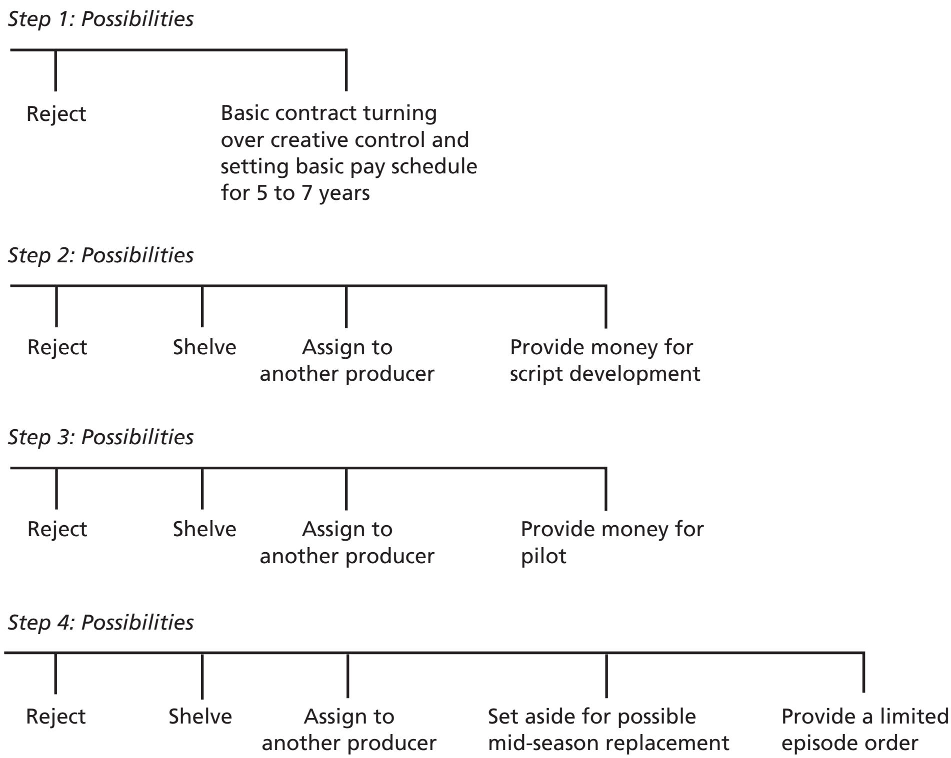
A *pilot* is a sample or prototype production of a series under consideration. Pilots afford programmers an opportunity to preview audience reaction to a property. Each of the Big Four networks orders between 30 and 45 pilots to fill expected gaps in its new season lineup (fewer for CW and Spanish-language networks). Once a network decides to film or tape a pilot, it draws up a budget and advances start-up money to the producer. The budget and advance may be regarded as the third major step in the program development process.

Half-hour pilots cost from \$1.5 million to \$3 million, depending on things like sets, costumes, special effects, star power and so on, with one-hour drama pilots costing more than twice that amount. Traditionally, pilot production costs were generally higher than costs for regular season shows because new sets had to be built, crews assembled and start-up costs paid. (However, the ongoing costs for the few megahits have recently risen far higher than the costs of their pilots.)

FOX and many producers have denounced the pilot system because of its incredible expense and abysmal success rate. FOX demands 5- to 10-minute presentation films in place of full-blown pilots for many shows, but this radical idea has met strong

2.12 The Program Development Process

Process begins with the review of new ideas submitted in the form of pitch sessions, requested submissions, open submissions, or company-developed proposals.



resistance from the other major broadcasters. Nowadays, of the approximately 130 pilots produced annually, many are formatted as made-for-TV movies. These can be played on regular movie nights and sold internationally as parts of movie packages, thus recouping the investment even if the series idea is not picked up. Series failing to make the final selection list for the fall season are held in reserve in anticipation of the inevitable cancellations. After seeing the pilots, the networks also "short order" some backup series, authorizing production of four to six episodes and additional scripts in case a backup show used as filler is unexpectedly successful. For a visualization of the development process, see 2.12.

The decisions to select series for airing based on their pilots usually take into consideration the following:

1. Current viewer preferences as indicated by ratings or profit margins
2. Costs
3. Resemblance between the proposed program and concepts that worked well in the past
4. Projected series' ability to deliver the targeted demographics for that network and its advertisers and its O&Os
5. Types of programs the competing networks air on nights when the new series might be scheduled

The following are of secondary weight but also relevant to a judgment:

6. The reputation of the producer and writers
7. The appeal of the series' performers (the talent)
8. The availability of an appropriate time period
9. The compatibility of the program with returning shows
10. The longevity of the concept (for example, in a program centered around children, the producer must remember children grow up)

Finally, increasingly relevant are these factors:

11. The number and type of countries that might buy the show or idea in syndication
12. The ability to reuse the show in another co-owned venture (another broadcast or cable network) or platform (internet or mobile media)
13. The size of the potential DVD sales market
14. The viability of inviting other companies to share the initial expenses
15. The possibility for advertiser tie-ins or cross promotion.

Of equal importance is whether the parent corporation can control the entire process from production to multiplatform distribution. The chief programmer juggles all of these considerations and perhaps others.

Schedule Churn

Stunting has resulted in a continual shifting of prime-time schedules, called *scheduling churn*. (Here the term *churn* refers to the continual shifting of programs within the network schedule and should not be confused with the term *subscriber churn* as it is used in the cable and pay-television industries.)

Moving programs in the schedule, using short runs and cancelling quickly are not the only causes of churn. These actions don't take into account network preemptions of their own shows, which have become distressingly commonplace. Indeed, over the last four years, each of the four major networks has averaged about a 40 percent preemption rate. In most cases, these preemptions were caused by running extra episodes of an already existing series (for example, running hordes of back-to-back episodes of *Reba*)—or by reversing the existing shows (for example, so cleverly flipping *Grey's Anatomy* and *Desperate Housewives*) for just one week, or by blocking the network's franchise shows for a couple of weeks (such as running all the *CSI*s on the same night or all the *Law & Order*s, or just one version three times, or…or…). Such preemptions hurt the long-term ratings of the bumped shows: Lost audiences don't come back. Very few examples of churn were the result of airing specials.

In short, regularly-scheduled series were missing from their scheduled slots almost two out of every four weeks between September and May. The writers' strike can account for some of this during the 2008–2009 season, but nothing accounts for it during the other years. And the churn rate was even worse during the summer.

Changes now occur weekly and it's virtually impossible to tell when the network is trying a stunt, fixing a move that didn't work, or dumping a show quickly. It is hard not to agree with Brooks (see 2.13) that this constant motion represents panic.

A program that a network wants to get rid of can be canceled outright or *manipulated* (time-shifted or churned) until its ratings fall. Manipulation sometimes makes good public relations sense when a show is critically successful or widely popular—but not quite popular enough among the desired demographic groups. Some critics have suggested that this was the problem with *Touched by an Angel*. Analysis of program churn over the long haul leads to two conclusions:

1. *An individual program's ratings almost always fall when it is moved two out of three weeks (especially when moved in the second season).*
2. *A new series—one that had improved upon the time slot it was originally given—always fails when moved.*

Prime candidates for purposive schedule manipulation include programs with higher-than-average production costs that would cause managerial

2.13 Explaining Network Churn

Industry expert Tim Brooks, author of *The Complete Directory of Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows,* blamed much of network churn on "panic." He pointed out that ratings had been declining since the mid-1970s but that the decline was not steady. Rather, ratings would first drop and then stabilize for a few years. When this happened, programmers would proclaim success, claiming they now had control of the problem (and then they would continue doing exactly what they had been doing).

These periods of stability were related to specific programs that, for a time, according to Brooks, brought in big audiences. During the 1980s, it was *Cosby;* then in the mid-1990s it was *Roseanne* and *Home Improvement*. Later the numbers again stabilized when *ER* and *Seinfeld* became hits, then *Survivor* further solidified them for a time. When one of these shows eventually slid downward, though, the overall ratings for that network went into a free fall. When this happens, as it inevitably does, programmers panic.

Instead of changing the practices that seem to be driving the audiences away, they do more of them. For example, when ratings began another free fall in 1997, programmers went into another schedule-shuffling frenzy. By 2004, the heavy reliance on reality series had multiplied the problem because such series almost always decline significantly in audience size in their second seasons and have no afterlife in either syndication or as DVD sets. Those based on a gimmick, like *The Simple Life,* often fall apart completely. Franchise shows seem to hold up better in syndication, but never match the original in ratings.

problems if abruptly canceled (because they are supported by a highly-placed executive or advertiser). The 1995 shift of *Murder, She Wrote* on CBS from Sundays to Thursdays may have been an example of this type of move. Two notable shifts, *The West Wing* from Wednesday to Sunday in 2005–06 and *King of Queens* in 2006–07 from Monday to Wednesday, are probably examples of purposive schedule shifts. *Once low ratings or even a downward trend is achieved, network programmers can point to the numbers to justify cancellation (on the few occasions when some justification seems useful).* During panics, however, programs seem to be moved for no apparent reason: Merely showing the parent company that something is being done seems to be the real programming strategy at such times.

Promotion's Role

All broadcast networks use frequent *on-air promotion* and *online promotion*, as well as *paid advertising,* to introduce new and moved programs. Beginning as early as mid-July and continuing through November, networks intensify promotion of both their programs and their overall images on their broadcast and owned cable channels. For some big-budget or especially promising shows, paid advertising in program guides and magazines also helps draw audience attention, often through cross promotion deals with advertisers.

Concurrently, the networks open elaborate websites for each new program containing character bios and pictures, the *backstory* of the series and the current plot line, merchandise to buy, interactive chat groups, feedback options, recent episodes or previews of upcoming episodes and other elements. *On-air promotional announcements are believed to play a pivotal role in the ratings success of a program.* Particularly essential are the on-screen *tune-in messages*, now taking up a significant portion of airtime. *Websites have a different function: They are thought to build loyalty to the program and involvement with specific characters, both contributing to satisfaction with a series and to frequent viewing.*

In the fall, on-air *promos* plug every program scheduled to appear in a season lineup. Weak or doubtful offerings needing extra stimulus get extra exposure on all platforms, at least until the network surrenders. Not until a program is safely past the rocks and shoals of its first several airings (or until the network decides it can't risk more early trials) does promotion let up. At least minimal on-air promotion continues as long as a show is on the schedule, but websites fade away (from lack of updates) when a show seems destined for cancellation. At this point fan sites take over (see 2.14).

In addition, networks use *print promotion*, especially magazines and newspaper listings, to catalog offerings for particular evenings. For a long time, *TV Guide* magazine was so important to network television that programmers sometimes delayed schedule changes so that the alterations could make *TV Guide's* deadline for affiliate program listings. The promotional value of *TV Guide* was enormous until its format became unwieldy after the digital channel explosion. Cable systems now provide electronic guides, essential because of the huge numbers and types of channels (digital, HD, 3D), with several ways of sorting and classifying program titles.

Magazines like *People* and *Us* have become major outlets for printed promotional materials, often run as features and not identified as promotional material. Cross-promotion using morning shows and cable outlets carrying popular behind-the-scenes specials is also critical for capturing attention. Some networks also join with major businesses, such as Kmart, Sears or McDonald's, to jointly promote the new season or a specific program.

Promotions in print, on the air and on the web are the primary ways networks invite viewers to try out programs. They are also the means by which the networks convince viewers to associate a program with a particular network (*franchising* or *branding*). At the same time, parent corporations are demanding heavy cross-promotion of a company's many subsidiaries—such as the CW using its TV shows to promote music from Atlantic, Elektra, Reprise, Rhino and Warner Bros. Records—which uses up air time that would previously have been used to promote episodes of individual programs. And it leaves less and less program time.

2.14 Fan Sites

Virtually every program has fan sites on the internet, and these remain long after the networks have forgotten a series. Indeed, one key function of fan sites is the more or less illegal sharing of taped episodes among fans. (According to *Variety*, studies have shown most people would use official downloads if they were available and at low prices; most people only pirate what the networks don't offer.) In addition, there are people who collect copies of virtually everything TV does, even if the networks don't think the offerings have any value. Somewhere out there are people who think *My Mother the Car* was a great show. Truth is, most people don't think of it as pirating when they find a show "in the trash" that the networks threw away. The networks, or at least their parent companies, might strongly disagree with that. At present, the networks are not keeping up with technology in their programming, their promotion, or their archiving.

Changing Format Emphases

To minimize risk, networks continue to rely on the traditional winners in prime time—situation comedies, dramas and movies—and somewhat reluctantly added unscripted programs (in shorthand, *reality*) to this exclusive list. Another change has been the increased use of *specials,* a term encompassing one-time entertainment programs, major sporting events, and more infrequently, news documentaries or interviews. Nonetheless, the proportions as well as kinds of *formats* dominating evening schedules have altered over time (see 2.15).

Situation comedies and *crime dramas* have a long history in network television, stretching back to such shows as *The Life of Riley* and *Dragnet* in the early 1950s all the way through *The Big Band Theory* and *CSI* in the late 2000s. In one recent season, the broadcast networks offered over 75 sitcoms and 30 crime dramas; in a subsequent season, the distribution had flipped to 17 sitcoms and 38 dramas plus 26 unscripted shows (and another 22 dramas on Univision). The concentration of shows into sitcoms and dramas occurred because they:

- attracted sizable audiences in the young female demographics.

- syndicate well off-network.

Unscripted shows supplanted some of this concentrated group because they:

- are comparatively inexpensive to produce.

Because of demand the cost of sitcoms and crime shows produced in the United States has escalated beyond that of most other formats. (Univision buys its soap-like dramas—*telenovelas*—less expensively from Mexico or produces them in Miami.) As a result, the crime drama has moved to the franchise route, and situation comedies have begun to all look alike. Although examples of top-rated shows in both of these types can be found, their overall success rate has declined steadily. Most years, the networks do not produce even one truly successful new sitcom (or drama).

Situation comedies fall into two main types: family-based comedies like *Two and a Half Men, George Lopez* and *How I Met Your Mother*—and occupational comedies like *Becker, The Office* and *Scrubs*. Together, these two types account for more than three-quarters of all situation comedies offered over the last 20 years. More unusual sitcom formats such as *10 Things I Hate About You* or *That '70s Show* occasionally turn up, but only in limited numbers. Crime dramas have slowly changed—from private citizen do-gooders like *Magnum P.I.* to gritty police dramas like *NYPD Blue* to investigations of somewhat revolting body parts like *CSI* and *Bones*.

The mid-1990s also saw the return of courtroom dramas, often in connection with a police show (as was the case with *Law & Order* and *Law & Order: SVU*), or on their own (as in *The Practice, Judging Amy* and *Without a Trace*). *Smallville*, an unusual comic book format, is most likely to become the franchise for the CW using the Justice League characters now part of *Smallville*.

Of the approximately 700 *specials* each year, more than 500 have been entertainment specials for young adults, such as the Justin Timberlake specials, the Charlie Brown Christmas specials and Univision's long-running *Sabado Gigante,* often considered a special even though it is part of the regular schedule. That's because of the type of program it is. A fast-paced variety, talk, and game show, *Sabado Gigante* airs every Saturday evening and attracts huge Spanish-speaking audiences inside the United States and throughout South and Central America. About 100 specials each year on U.S. television are sports specials, including the annual Super Bowl and World Series games. The remaining 100 divide among dramatic specials and news specials, including interviews such as those by Barbara Walters, and occasional documentaries.

Entertainment specials often attract superstars (such as Robin Williams or Bob Newhart) whose regular motion picture work, performance schedules or health prevents them from participating in series programs. *Star-studded specials can invigorate a schedule, encourage major advertiser participation, provide unusual promotional opportunities, and generate high ratings and critical approval.* However, they cost a lot of money and are consequently rare. Programs such as *Glee* or *Saturday Night Live* now bring in these superstars as guests. In some cases, stars may actually beg, or rather have their agents beg, to get on the program. A flood of award shows, clones of the *Academy Awards* and *Grammy Awards,* are now promoted as "Star-Studded Specials," but few are as big a draw as the annual *Academy Awards*. Indeed, many so-called entertainment specials are merely long forms of regular series or regular episodes with big-name guest stars.

For example, the record-breaking final episode of *M*A*S*H* (amassing an extraordinary 77 share) was an extended episode of the existing series, as was the final episode of *Seinfeld*. *Friends* did several long-form shows leading up to their final episode, all of them called specials. Network programmers are awake to the possibility that too many specials differing sharply from the regular programming might interrupt carefully nurtured viewing habits beyond repair—hence, the trend toward long-form episodes of regularly scheduled series. Such shows also have the advantage of being relatively inexpensive to produce and promote, and they exploit existing audiences, thus reducing risk.

Nowadays, network *prime-time sports* consist of playoffs and championships in the major sports,

2.15 Is There a Doctor in The House?

Always a runner-up. That might be that way to describe medical dramas on the broadcast networks. Never the dominant format, but always there, usually in the top 10. However, over the years, they changed.

Back in 1948, medical programs were serious science. Starting on the old Dumont Network (and then moving to CBS), *The Johns Hopkins Science Review* was one of those shows critics loved and very few people watched. It offered the latest breakthroughs in medicine and other areas of science (a topic that has moved to evening newscasts). In the early 1950s, long before Googling, the program was where people went to get the latest word on the polio epidemics and the treatments. It was also where they went to see the latest information about rockets. When it went off the air in 1954, it was replaced with two shows: *Medical Horizons* on ABC—a series, like *Johns Hopkins*, which presented the latest breakthroughs, but only in medicine—and *Medic* on NBC, which dramatized case files from the Los Angeles Medical Association. *Medic* was more successful, but both typified the ways the medical profession was dealt with during the 1950s. Medicine was serious stuff, and even when stories were dramatized, they came "theoretically" just from the facts.

That all changed in 1961 when two groundbreaking shows hit in the same year. *Dr. Kildare* (taken from the movie of the same name) and *Ben Casey* both featured a brilliant, but nonconformist young doctor and his wise, older mentor. These doctors did more than cure sickness—with almost God-like success: They also solved an endless array of other people's personal problems. For the next 20 years, right up until *Trapper John,* they set the formula for successful medical dramas. But in 1972, a slight change began to creep in with the premiere of *Emergency*.

It's hard to think of *Emergency* as groundbreaking—but for the first time, a medical show had an ensemble cast, not just two major characters. What was meant to form a bridge between action-adventure and medical drama also formed a bridge between the existing formula and its next incarnation, which occurred in 1982 with *St. Elsewhere*. Set in a big-city teaching hospital, *St. Elsewhere* was a complete break from the programs with the God-like doctors that preceded it. Here doctors were all too human, with some driven by money, others by a yearning for fame. Instead of solving everyone else's problems, doctors started worrying about their own. The whole show was somehow less antiseptic, grittier, more inner-city, and the topics they dealt with ranged from breast and testicular cancer to AIDS to rape and gang violence and so on. This was the show that made it okay for men to appear nude, at least from behind. Doctors on television would never climb back up on the pedestals they had previously occupied. Even when the doctor is a certified genius, such as in FOX's *House*, he's still an arrogant jerk.

St. Elsewhere's most enduring legacy, however, was the ensemble cast. From that time, right through *Gray's Anatomy*, no one or two stars carried a medical drama. From the point of view of producers this has the huge benefit of allowing stars to leave and new ones be brought in without damaging the show. As a result, ensemble programs can run forever, so long as there's a sickness to tackle. Notably, not a single character who appeared in the early episodes of NBC's *ER* was still there when it finally finished its 15-year run in 2009, and yet the show continued to be a top-10 contender. By evolving over time, the medical drama has not only kept itself healthy but has been longer-lived than most formats.

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as well as special events such as the Olympics (see 2.16 about Roone Arledge's extraordinary influence). FOX and NBC, in particular, often use sports to fill the first two months of the new prime-time season, introducing regular series as late as November. Although the networks carry a great deal of football, basketball, baseball, tennis, and golf, and Univision has soccer, most of these shows are relegated to the weekends (see Chapter 7). Most soccer, wrestling, Nascar, and other sports command prime time only on cable, not on the broadcast networks.

Cable has become the true home of sports. Even ABC responded to pressure for the network to do something to attract more "ideal women," even at the expense of its traditional audience for the long-running

2.16 Roone Arledge: The Man Who Brought Sports into Prime Time

When Roone Arledge was first hired by ABC in 1960 as a lowly assistant producer, the television networks considered sports to be second-rate entertainment. Even professional team owners at the time believed that televised sports existed to sell tickets for the ballparks. Roone Arledge could not have disagreed more. He was convinced that sports programming could entertain the fans at home, and under his leadership, the sports broadcasting industry was completely recreated.

Arledge came up with a revolutionary approach to producing sports: He borrowed the production techniques of entertainment and used them to duplicate the experience of actually attending a game at the stadium. He used many more cameras, microphones and graphics in his sports telecasts than his competitors had ever used, and he experimented constantly with new technologies. Arledge and his team of talented engineers pioneered or refined the use of underwater cameras, handheld cameras, isolation cameras, field microphones, split screens, instant replay, slow motion and freeze frames. Their efforts resulted in new production techniques that heightened the drama of sporting events. Arledge also began the practice of focusing on the personalities and stories of the athletes. He invented what was called "up close and personal" coverage—airing pretaped biographical features of athletes right before their events—to involve viewers emotionally with the players and the outcomes.

During the 1960s, the television networks aired sports only on weekend afternoons. But ABC's successful prime-time broadcasts of the 1968 Olympic Games convinced Arledge, by then the president of ABC Sports, that sports programming could compete with sitcoms and dramas in prime time. *Monday Night Football,* an Arledge creation, premiered in 1970 and quickly became a phenomenal success in the ratings. (It is worth noting that CBS and NBC had both rejected the NFL's proposal for the show.)

During the 1970s, one sport after another moved into prime time, and fees for broadcast rights for sports skyrocketed because of soaring revenues from prime-time advertising.

In the following decades, sports programming expanded further into network schedules, and limited choices have given way to lineups containing dozens of channels devoted to exclusively to sports. In addition, many professional leagues, college conferences, and even some individual teams have started their own television networks (though they are more like syndicators than real networks). Also, some professional leagues have partnered with cable and satellite providers to offer premium access to all regular and postseason games. Sports has continued to dominate much of broadcast schedules, with league playoffs and championships consistently among the highest-rated programs year after year.

Despite starting with very limited resources, Arledge transformed ABC Sports into the preeminent sports network of the day and initiated a phenomenon that lasts to today. Although Arledge died in 2002, his immense influence will continue to be seen for decades to come. He forever changed ABC, and beyond that network, programming strategies and schedules for all television, the economics of professional and college sports, and the way that viewers watch sports on television.

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Monday Night Football, and shifted the show to ESPN. (Also, ESPN makes more money for Disney than ABC does, which probably affected the move.) *Big sporting events do bring prestige to the network, are popular with affiliates, and fill out advertising packages by delivering male viewers of all ages, but the costs paid by broadcast networks for the biggest events no longer match returns.*

Unscripted programming is the overall term used by the industry to cover reality programs, news magazines and game shows. It refers to the types of programs that do not require the expensive writing and controlled production used for other series. While such shows have writers providing ad-libs for hosts and outlining situations, the writing costs as well as talent costs are minimal compared with other genres. These three types of programs are certainly not new. The magazine format goes back decades, game shows ruled the airwaves during the 1950s, and artificial situation shows can be traced back at least as far as *Candid Camera*. What is new is the power they command.

Like the sitcom, there have been some immense hits in the *reality genre*. *American Idol, Survivor* and *Dancing with the Stars* have had staying power, but others, such as *Joe Millionaire,* did well once but fell apart once the gimmick was known. To date, nearly all reality series have dropped substantially in the ratings during their second outings. Even the most popular series in this format (with the two notable exceptions of *American Idol* and *Survivor: Vanuatu*) don't match on a regular basis the ratings of a *CSI, Gray's Anatomy, The Mentalist, The Office* or other top scripted series.

The power of reality is that it is incredibly cheap to produce: less than one-tenth the cost of scripted programs. The networks have also been able to standardize reality shows by fitting them into a rigid formula: A group of people you hope you never meet in real life backstab and cut each other's throats on the way to a big prize; during each show, one participant is thrown off after the group performs some outlandish stunt; the outcast then hits the morning talk shows and news circuit to hype the ongoing program. The only thing that changes is the situation. One variation that makes critics groan is the dumbed-down quiz show, epitomized by *Are you Smarter Than a Fifth-Grader?*. Because reality shows are so cheap to produce, they also provide a way to create original summer programming, thus helping the move toward a full 52-week schedule.

But the flurry of creativity that characterized some of the early entries has now settled into as formulaic a pattern as most sitcoms. One problem with reality series is that many of the concepts were borrowed from popular shows in Japan and Europe, and thus our versions are very hard to sell back. The other major problem is that each show needs a gimmick, and to maintain the shock value (and thus generate hype), the situations have been pushed closer and closer to outright pornography or life risking situations. We may yet get our first on-air tragedy.

Magazine series like *60 Minutes, 20/20, Primetime, Dateline* and so on are almost as numerous as reality series in prime time. The shows are produced directly by a network's news division and have earned consistent though middle-of-the-pack ratings for years. Like the other unscripted formats, magazine series are, comparatively, very cheap to produce, and unlike reality series, several have been able to run forever with little decline from their initial ratings. They also serve as prestige programs for the networks (see 2.17). *But like reality series, magazine shows have no afterlife. Neither type works well in rerun, and they have no life as a DVD set and no syndication potential, although in some rare cases their ideas may be franchised to other countries.*

Game shows enjoyed a brief resurgence in the late 1990s, were badly overused, and then appeared to vanish. Actually, they merged with reality series, most of which are now games, but in its purer form, the game show had been relegated to syndicated access time (for instance, *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*).

Although increased costs have led to fewer movie nights over the last few years, three types of productions regarded as movies still fill some of prime time on the broadcast television networks: (1) *theatrical feature films,* those made originally for release in theaters; (2) *made-for-TV movies,* similar to feature films but made specifically for network television airing in a two-hour format containing commercial breaks; and (3) *miniseries*, multipart films made especially for broadcast airing in installments. All three types share these major advantages for the networks:

- They fill large amounts of time with material that usually generates respectable ratings.
- They make it possible to air topical or controversial material that may be deemed inappropriate for regularly scheduled network series or can be taken directly from the headlines.
- They permit showcasing actors and actresses who would otherwise never be seen on television.
- They allow the network to reward stars from their popular series by giving them a movie.

The three kinds of movies also share one major disadvantage—extraordinarily high cost for the

2.17

Tick tick tick tick. A ticking watch quickly became synonymous with CBS's groundbreaking, hour-long, investigative news magazine, *60 Minutes*, when it launched on September 24, 1968 (the stopwatch appeared after few episodes). Legendary news producer Don Hewitt (1922–2009), who directed venerable CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow for the first few years of *See It Now* (1951–1958), directed the first televised presidential debates in 1960 (Kennedy v. Nixon) and produced the *CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* for years, created this prime-time Sunday staple, serving as its executive producer until 2004. It is the longest-running, regularly-scheduled, prime-time broadcast program in American television. It has garnered 78 Emmys and five Peabody Awards. It was the top-ranked show for five years and among the top-10* Nielsen-rated programs for 23 seasons (1977–2000). It continues to be among the top-20 shows each week and the most-watched news magazine. *TV Guide* ranks it number six among its "50 Greatest TV Shows of All Time," and the only news program in its top 10.

Today's investigative techniques of hidden cameras, "gotcha" guerilla tactics, and re-edited interviews can be traced to *60 Minutes*. Originally hosted by Harry Reasoner and Mike Wallace, other journalists and commentators have come and gone in the 40-plus years of this storied program. Morley Safer, Lesley Stahl, Andy Rooney and others became household names and celebrity reporters thanks to this high-profile "magazine for television" (as Reasoner introduced it in the first episode). Part-time correspondents include a laundry list of legendary news personalities, including Ed Bradley, Connie Chung, Anderson Cooper, Walter Cronkite, Katie Couric, Bryant Gumbel, Lara Logan, Dan Rather, Diane Sawyer and Eric Sevareid.

Through the years, *60 Minutes* has been embroiled in controversy for some of its reporting. In 1982, a package asserted that General William Westmoreland withheld information about the Vietnam War from key people in Washington. Westmoreland denounced the story, and *60 Minutes* issued a statement that it did not believe the general was unpatriotic, while standing by the accuracy of the report. In 2000, the program landed an exclusive interview with Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City Bomber who had been found guilty and sentenced to death. McVeigh ranted against the U.S. government, and subsequently face-to-face interviews with death-row inmates were made illegal. In 1995, *60 Minutes* did *not* run a story, for which it was criticized. The producers had information that Brown & Williamson, a tobacco company, had disregarded information about the health risks of its cigarettes and had tampered with the tobacco to enhance the effect of nicotine. Don Hewitt hesitated to run such a scathing expose, and instead *The Wall Street Journal* broke the story. Eventually, *60 Minutes* aired an altered version, minus some of the most incriminating evidence. The Oscar-nominated film, *The Insider* (1999), dramatizes this incident. When all is said and done, though, it is expected that hard-hitting journalism, as championed by *60 Minutes*, will run into criticism sometimes; otherwise, it can be argued that the reporters are not doing their jobs.

Doing their jobs is a hallmark of the *60 Minutes* investigative team. Whether reporting on Vietnam and Watergate in the early years or the current presidential administration, this original and time-honored news magazine, which its creator, Don Hewitt, said married "show biz" and "news biz," is considered to be the preeminent investigative program on American television. It paved the way for many that followed, including ABC's *20/20* (1978), PBS's *Frontline* (1983), NBC's *Dateline* (1992), and others. It has been franchised in other countries, including Australia, New Zealand and Peru. Audio broadcasts of the show are distributed by CBS Radio, and commercial-free audio podcasts are available from iTunes. The TV broadcasts stream on CBSNews.com and CNETTV.com. The show has its own website at CBSNews.com and its own YouTube channel, *http://www.youtube.com/user/60minutes?ob=5*. It has spawned a few other series, such as the short-lived *60 Minutes II*, and it has a relatively new web series, *60 Minutes Overtime* (*http://www.cbsnews.com/60minutesovertime*), with internet-exclusive content beyond the TV program. A pretty good run for a show that just keeps on ticking….

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networks. Miniseries are typically the most expensive, and theatrical movies the second-most costly. Both are more risky in ratings than made-for-TV movies, but *all three remain popular because they fill big chunks of time and can be used to temporarily plug holes in the schedule until programmers can figure out something to schedule.*

Theatrical movies have declined in popularity because of exceptionally high costs and generally low ratings when run on the Big Three networks. The truth is that by the time a theatrical movie makes it to broadcast TV, it is already very late in its life cycle. It has played the theaters, run on pay-per-view, and is probably available on VOD. It may have been released for rental, run on cable movie channels and sold as a DVD. Consequently, ratings on the networks are almost always disappointing, even for the biggest blockbusters. Made-for-TV movies just perform better. Miniseries not only perform better but also have a strong afterlife in foreign syndication and as DVDs.

Many viewers and critics bewail the disappearance of the *dramatic anthology* format: a set of single-episode television plays presented in an unconnected series. What actually happened was that the anthology format went through a style change and returned as the made-for-TV movie. During the 1955–56 season, the very peak of the anthology era, dramatic anthologies made up about 526 hours of prime time. In the 1989–90 season, a peak year, 624 made-for-TV movies aired in prime time (not including those made for cable).

The best of these movies compare favorably with the best of the dramatic anthologies of the earlier era. Such movies also allow the networks to respond quickly to major news events. The Scott Peterson case was a movie even before it went to trial. The Elizabeth Smart and Jessica Lynch stories became competing films on more than one network, and the big guys fought about who was going to be first to do the Anna Nicole Smith story almost as much as the lawyers fought about who was going to get to bury her. Hot topics like drugs, sex and teenage problems can be dealt with in movies in ways a prime-time series just doesn't allow (see 2.18). TV movies shown on co-owned cable channels are another method of testing new characters and plot ideas—especially for material that might be too risqué for broadcast networks!

The made-for-TV movie has replaced the pilot as the major method for testing new series ideas. Programs such as *Glee,* succeeded as television—or in this case cable movies (*High School Musical*)—before becoming series. Made-for-TV movies as pilots have four distinct advantages:

1. They can be profitable.
2. They can target a desired demographic group.
3. Audiences and affiliates like them.
4. They have international syndication potential as theatrical movies.

TV movie pilots now average $5 million to make (some as high as $10 million), but they pay their way whether or not the concept ever becomes a series. Even when they fail, the networks usually have made a healthy profit on the TV movie's initial run, its foreign syndication and the DVD sale. *Moreover, the made-for-TV movie has the advantage of being made-to-order to fit within a network's existing schedule. It can target a specific audience to maintain a night's flow and avoid the disruptions that specials often cause.*

The success of limited series on PBS's *Masterpiece Theatre* led the commercial networks into the production of multipart series presented in two to six episodes on successive nights or in successive weeks. Called *miniseries*, they could run for as long as 10 or more hours, typically beginning and ending on Sunday nights—the night of maximum viewing. Shorter miniseries tend to be scheduled on sequential nights, while longer series stretch over two weeks, skipping the evenings on which the network has its most popular programs. These extreme long forms, however, have become very rare because of their exceedingly high cost. Despite the advantages of blockbuster ratings, prestige, critical acclaim and series potential, the broadcast networks switched from long-form to *short-form miniseries* (four to six hours).

Such high-level fantasy concepts as *Merlin, Alice in Wonderland* and *Leprechauns,* the Romeo-and-Juliet takeoff, earned high ratings on the networks but also sold well internationally and as DVD sets